Self -Care

Self-care is an essential life skill and must be prioritised in order to maintain positive wellbeing. Self-care is about looking after yourself and making sure that all of your needs are fulfilled. Good self-care means taking positive steps to nurture and develop yourself physically, emotionally, socially, occupationally and spiritually.

* Self-care is different for each individual but we all have basic needs including:
	+ Giving yourself the nutrients your body needs
	+ Having enough rest to recover from being active
	+ Sleeping well enough to replenish your body and mind
	+ Being physically active enough to keep your body energised

As well as these basic needs, it’s also important to make sure that you are meeting your emotional needs, spending time with people that you have positive relationships with, and engaging in activities that help you to feel positive towards yourself and your contribution to your community.

We all have the same basic needs - it’s part of being human. Not properly tending to these needs is likely to cause difficulties for yourself down the line, if it isn’t already.

Self-care is something that we have to prioritise on an ongoing basis, as part of our everyday lives. In addition to this, we will all come across times when we particularly struggle, when something doesn’t go how we wanted it to or when our relationships negatively impact on us. During these times, it is especially important to take active steps to comfort and care for yourself.

1. How to Practice Self-Care

Practicing self-care requires the following skills:

* An ability to recognise that your needs are not being met
* Motivation to take better care of yourself
* Knowing how to care for yourself
* Taking active steps to meet your needs

Recognising when your needs are not being met

Your mind and body are designed to tell you when something isn’t right. This might come in the form of physical (e.g. headache, tiredness) or emotional (e.g. anxiety, stress) reactions.

Emotions play a big part in understanding our daily life – how we feel reflects what is going on in the world around us and guides us how to respond. For example, if we feel anxious it’s likely to be because we have detected some kind of threat in our environment. If we feel calm, it’s suggesting that we are safe and can explore the world around us.

It’s important to learn to listen to the signals that your mind and body are giving you and respond accordingly. Our brains and how we react to our environment is very complex. Try not to be too hard on yourself if you respond in a way that you don’t like – some things happen automatically and are designed to be this way. Sometimes we misinterpret the signals our body is giving us or we ignore things that we don’t want to (or can’t) deal with.

Improving your ability to recognise when your needs are not being met

Being honest with yourself – take some time to acknowledge whether the way you are currently living your life is the best for you right now. Have a think about what your body is telling you and ask yourself how you are feeling. Consider speaking to someone you trust about whether they think you would benefit from taking better care of yourself.

Meditation

Meditation is a skill that improves your awareness of your inner self (the part that only you can see). It allows you to observe what is going on inside – your thoughts, feelings and physical sensations. The idea is to explore your current experiences without judgement and to just learn about yourself and how you work. It’s not about stopping your thoughts or feelings but being curious about what is there. You then can choose whether you hold onto the thought or feeling or let it go. Like any new skill, it takes time and practice to develop and it’s easier to start when you are feeling relatively ok.

Links:

Meditation Apps

 [Calm - The #1 App for Meditation and Sleep](https://www.calm.com/)

 [Chill Panda – Reducing anxiety and improving wellbeing in Children through a fun gaming app](http://chillpanda.co.uk/)

 [Meditation and Sleep Made Simple - Headspace](https://www.headspace.com/)

Taking Note

Taking note of your thoughts, feelings and emotions at different times and in different situations can help you to learn how you respond to changes in your environment. After doing this regularly over a period of time, you might be able to notice patterns that tell you where you could make positive changes in your day-to-day life.

Ask someone else

Sometimes other people spot changes in us more easily than we do. If someone knows you well, they might be able to give you pointers about how to spot if you are struggling.

2. Motivation to take better care of yourself

Motivation to make changes can be difficult. Often there are many competing demands placed on us, many of which require us to prioritise everything other than looking after ourselves! People also sometimes find it hard to take care of themselves because they don’t realise it’s possible to feel better or they feel that other people are struggling more and so their needs are more important. Knowing you need to take care of yourself isn’t enough. For it to be effective, you need to feel that it is important and worthwhile.

Remember that unless you are looking after yourself, you are not going to be able to give your best, either to yourself or your ambitions, or to those around you.

If you are struggling to feel your needs are important enough to prioritise, you may benefit from exploring your self-esteem.

Improving your motivation to take better care of yourself

**Pros and Cons**

1. Think about the advantages and disadvantages of looking after your needs – consider doing some research about the different self-care strategies and learn more about why they might be important.

2. Identify the consequences (both now and in the future) of not taking better care of yourself.

3. Take into account what is important to you, what you value – consider whether how you care for yourself currently reflect this.

3. Knowing how to care for yourself

Being able to take good care of yourself requires you to know what you need. This can involve a bit of trial and error. For example, some people like a lot of social contact and their wellbeing benefits from this, while others need time to themselves to recharge.

Only you know what is right for you so it’s important to try a few things and see how well they work for you. Don’t worry if things don’t work straight away, it can take some time for some of these techniques to make a difference.

The important thing is knowing how to take care of all aspects of yourself. Having a physically fit body will only get you so far if you focus on this at the expense of your emotional needs. Self-kindness requires you to recognise your limits and work with them, not against them.

Links:

* [Foundations of Wellbeing](https://warwick.ac.uk/services/wss/topics/wellbeing/)
* [Managing Anxiety](https://warwick.ac.uk/services/wss/topics/anxiety/)
* [Emotional Resilience](https://warwick.ac.uk/services/wss/topics/emotional_resilience/)
* [Relaxation](https://warwick.ac.uk/services/wss/topics/relaxation/)
* [Work Life Balance](https://warwick.ac.uk/services/wss/topics/worklife/)
* Self-Soothing

4. Taking active steps to meet your needs

Even if we know the things that we’re ‘supposed’ to do to stay well, it still doesn’t mean we do them. You are more likely to keep something up if you believe it is important, you feel it is worthwhile and it makes you feel good.

For self-care to be effective, it needs to be maintained on an ongoing basis. Making changes that are realistic in your life are much more likely to be successful. Don’t put too much pressure on yourself to be ‘perfect’ at looking after yourself. It’s OK to do it ‘well enough’ as long as you are being honest with yourself about why you are doing certain things and the impact it is having on you.